This furtive FCC review scares the hell out of me. I commend FCC Commissioners Copps and Adelstein for their candor and courage. To Chairman Powell, shame on you! You are not a surrogate for me. You do not represent the public interest of the average American, only the "public interest" of the media companies. This is the email I wrote and sent out today. It represents my views on the subject of media consolidation.

Please read on, as what I'm about to tell you threatens two core American values—freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

And please take three minutes to register your public comment. Those three minutes can help preserve democracy. http://gullfoss2.fcc.gov/ecfs/Upload/

You may not know this...after all the big media conglomerates don't want you to.... but right now the Federal Communications Commission is deciding on changing media ownership rules that could massively and irreversibly change the media landscape. The FCC is supposed to look at the rules and ensure that they preserve competition, diversity and localism in the media.

Ten media conglomerates control the news and entertainment in America—AOL/Time Warner, Viacom, General Electric, Liberty Media, Walt Disney, News Corporation, Bertelsmann, Vivendi Universal, Sony and AT&T. Whether you're liberal, conservative, poor, rich, rural, urban, white, black, asian, native american, or hispanic—the media messages you get shape your perspective of the world. Media shapes what issues you support, what issues you protest, and who you vote for.

Fortunately for 60 years, the FCC rules have prevented individual companies from gaining too much control over what we see, hear, and read. For example, they prevent a newspaper from owning a TV station in the same city, or a TV network owning more than 35% of the national market. It's up to the FCC to determine if the rules are in the public interest. FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein said, "if we permit further media consolidation and it turns out to be a mistake, we will find it difficult, if not impossible, to put the toothpaste back in the tube."

So a free independent press would bring this story to the public. Right? This would prove they are unfettered by corporate interests. Wrong. The very institutions we rely on for disclosure are most affected by the outcome. "Of the major broadcasters, only ABC reported [it] and that was at 4:40 in the morning. While the big newspapers did somewhat better, only the Los Angeles Times mentioned that its corporate owner, the Tribune Company, was actively lobbying for deregulation."---This is according to one of the only media outlets that did report the issue: Public Television.

Even to those who are not fans of government regulation, the power these media conglomerates wield is scary. After all a free press makes a well-informed citizenry—the backbone of democracy.

Why do media conglomerates want these rules changed? Answer: Not

only do they want to make and own the product, they want to own all the marketing and distribution channels as well. Take Viacom for example. They produce a movie or TV show through Paramount, people see it at one of their 1,800 cinemas, then it's broadcast on UPN, Nickelodeon, Showtime, MTV, Comedy Central, The Movie Channel, or The Sundance Channel. Or perhaps they'd air it on CBS, also owned by Viacom. No doubt you'd tune in on one of 31 Viacomowned local TV stations. Want to read the book? It's published by Simon and Shuster. And they can advertise the movie on Viacom's 184 radio stations, or through the exclusive advertising rights they have for billboards, buses, trains, and kiosks in New York, LA and 90 other cities. And later you can rent the movie at Blockbuster. All along the way, Viacom gets a piece of the action, while maximizing efficiencies, reducing expenses, leveraging synergies and gaining market share.

All of which is great for free enterprise, but can have a chilling effect on free speech. For example, are media conglomerates who sell billions of dollars worth of ad time to politicians going to accurately report the need for campaign finance reform?

If you listen to FCC Chairman Michael Powell, you'd wonder what all the fuss is about. "...I always giggle a little bit as an antitrust attorney, I would love to have six competitors in so many other markets in the United States...I'd love to have six home depot competitors in my local hardware, home improvement market..."

So let's take Powell's Home Depot example. Would you like it if there were only six places in the U.S. where you could buy your hammer? What if you could only buy the hammer that Home Depot makes? And what if the "product" were not a hammer. Instead, it's news about the war in Iraq, or details about a political candidate, or information on healthcare or your favorite song on the radio?

What if you lived in Minot, North Dakota, where one company, Clear Channel Communications owns six out of the seven commercial radio stations? On January 18, 2002, a train carrying hazardous materials derailed at 1:30 a.m. spilling 210,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia in an incident federal regulators called "catastrophic". Minot authorities said when they called with the warning about the toxic cloud; there was no one on the air who could've made the announcement. Clear Channel said someone was there who could have activated an emergency broadcast. But Minot police said nobody answered the phones.

Some people believe the radio deregulation resulting from the 1996 Telecommunications Act has made Clear Channel too powerful, and the industry has become much less diverse.

"...People are always going to say that," said Bob Wright, Chairman and CEO of NBC. "But the reality is, that's what it is, and they're well within the rules. We're talking about a set of (radio) rules that have been around now for eight or nine years, and (radio operators are) well within them, and I doubt if you're ever going to see any changes in that. I'm saying we (TV broadcasters) have a set of rules that have been around that are

60 years old, that everybody that looks at them says they're ridiculous and they should be changed, but we fall into this kind of political routine that they're the only (FCC rules) left..."

"...Congress's relaxation of the rules on radio consolidation has been the canary in the mine, said FCC Commissioner, Jonathan Adelstein. Adelstein says the miners are the all consumers affected by FCC rules that govern ownership of television, radio, cable and newspapers. He warns that the FCC better carefully consider the health of that canary before making changes that could alter the media landscape as much or more than the change in radio laws in 1996. ".... If we are to craft media ownership rules that best serve the public interest, we must hear from the public..."

Unfortunately, the FCC chairman Powell doesn't seem interested in hearing from the public. (But the public can go to his website and see a picture of Powell shaking the hand of AOL/Time Warner CEO Richard Parsons.) Thanks to Powell, the rulemaking is going quickly and quietly, with powerful corporate lobbyists dominating the deliberations.

"Well, the input of individual citizens is invaluable," said Powell. "They can file comments and express those views on the record. And we can use them. Part of what they have to count on is us to be their surrogate. I don't think that the average consumer can probably individually produce the kinds of data that the court insists we have."

Powell finally consented to hold one public hearing only after Commissioner Michael Copps planned to conduct field hearings on his own. That one hearing was held in Richmond during a blizzard. And Powell insisted that no more public hearings were needed. Fortunately Copps and Adelstein went around him and held a meeting in Seattle, WA and Charlotte, NC---neither of which the FCC chairman attended.

So how can we, the public, have a say in this? Well, we don't have much time. Powell says the FCC will make its critical decisions on June 2. Even though thirty Congressmen signed a letter criticizing the FCC for not adequately publicizing the media ownership debate and rushing the rules-changing process to favor major media outlets. And even though FCC Commissioner Michael Copps said that the FCC investigation into media industry consolidation has been hampered because key sources fear they would lose their jobs if they come forward.

We must tell Michael Powell "Don't rush such an important decision that can't be undone." Please, please file a public comment today. Tell the FCC that freedom of speech and freedom of the press are too precious to lose. Tell them to do a thorough job investigating the effects of further media consolidation. Tell them that the public wants a say in what goes over public airwaves. You can do it on the web.

Here's the website where you can file your public comment:

http://gullfoss2.fcc.gov/ecfs/Upload/

It won't take more than three minutes. Those three minutes can

help preserve democracy.

Thank you!

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Want more information on this issue? Here are the sources used to write this letter:

Now with Bill Moyers

http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/fcc.html
This excellent in-depth site contains:

- · Alarming facts and figures that show how mass media is being controlled by a handful of companies
- · A timeline of the FCC's rulemaking "process"
- · Links to the FCC and other articles and resources

The Nation

http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20020107&c=1&s=miller See a dramatic visual depiction of vast holding of the big ten media giants

Columbia Journalism Review http://www.cjr.org/owners/

The Hollywood Reporter

http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hollywoodreporter/search/article\_results.jsp?

text=FCC&simpleSearchButton=submit&simpleSearch=true&sortByDate=on

Center for Digital Democracy

http://www.democraticmedia.org/issues/mediaownership/index.html

Writers Guild of America

www.wga.org

The WGA has blamed media industry consolidation for the loss of 10,000 jobs in California over the past three years and warns the trend will persist if ownership limits are eased.

Journalism.org http://journalism.org/